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ABSTRACT

A modified impress approach to teaching reading has been successfully used in a program involving first grade students. The program was multisensory and included aural, oral, visual, and kinesthetic learning experiences gained through listening, group discussions, dramatic play, art activities, audience reading, and recorded oral reading. These activities were used to teach visual and auditory skills for reading readiness, word recognition, comprehension, oral and silent reading, and appreciation for literature. Inspiration for choice of materials was drawn from assertions about the contributions of folk tales and fairy tales to the psychological and emotional well-being of children. The program consisted of six basic steps designed to do the following: (1) pique the interests of children in traditional literature by the use of adult oral models; (2) assist auditory recall by reading materials that conform to an ideal schema in repetitive and cumulative patterns; (3) promote improvements in visual discrimination and visual memory with multisensory methods; (4) increase feelings of self-confidence and heighten motivation; and (5) prepare the children to read independently. Testing and retesting of the children showed improvements in their self-concepts as well as effective use of context clues when attacking words. One striking feature was the reduced incidence of needed help with phonics. On the negative side, some children presented a condition of "information overload," represented by their inability to remember repetitive passages, their inability to sustain visual attention, and auditory distractibility during oral taping sessions. (HOD)

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A MODIFIED IMPRESS METHOD FOR BEGINNING READERS

by

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A MODIFIED IMPRESS METHOD FOR BEGINNING READERS

If you have become discouraged because your students read word-by-word with little expression or comprehension, and if they have become increasingly anxious and frustrated during reading activities and rarely read for recreation, this article may help you.

In 1978 we began to teach reading with an eclectic method to a group of fifteen third graders. Most had average receptive and expressive language skills but were reading one or more years below grade placement. After six months of instruction the results were so encouraging that we revised the method and extended instruction to second graders in 1979 and, with further revisions, to first graders during the 1980-81 school year. The program for the first graders is described here.

It was multisensory and included aural, oral, visual, and kinesthetic learning experiences gained through listening, group discussions, dramatic play, art activities, audience reading, and recorded oral reading. Through these activities the visual and auditory skills for reading readiness, word recognition, comprehension, oral and silent reading, and appreciation of literature were taught. When we began in 1978, inspiration for choice of method was drawn from an experiment in simultaneous reading by a teacher and a student reported by (Heckelman, 1966). He called the procedure the Neurological Impress Method. We named our method "Modified Neurological Impress." For all modifications in the original method we were eclectic and intuitively added teaching strategies learned from our experiences in developmental, corrective, and remedial reading programs. Inspiration

for choice of materials was drawn from assertions of (Bettleheim, 1977) about the contributions of folk tales and fairy tales to the psychological and emotional well-being of children. In his opinion children's confrontations with moral conflicts in folk fairy tales are vital for healthy development.

In April 1980 nine of our kindergarten children scored below the fiftieth percentile in reading on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. Their scores qualified them to receive supplementary reading instruction in our Title I reading program. All the children were from low-to-middle income families. Most showed a lack of familiarity with reading mechanics and an inability to make aural, oral, visual, and kinesthetic matches in their efforts to follow print. Actually, they appeared to lack experience with books - a phenomenon that we have observed in increasing numbers of children in recent years. Our staff understood that language development, the development of reading interests, and reading performance are all enhanced by reading aloud to children from infancy. In a review of research on the values of reading aloud, (McCormick, 1977) restated the importance of the above interrelationships.

We were also sensitive to the differences between spontaneous speech and the language of print - that reading is not merely "talk written down" as conventional wisdom may dictate. Instead, the language of print is frequently more complex than speech in its vocabulary and syntax as observed by (Chomsky, 1972); (Spragg, 1978) described the condition as:

". . . the reading aloud of stories forms a bridge between the conversational oral language which the child usually hears,

> and the more formal language which he will encounter when he starts to read independently . . . The language in books is more formal, complete and correct, and the child needs to become accustomed to this" (p. 3).

With these understandings we concluded that the challenge was to provide multisensory activities at school and a homework program that would link oral language to the more formal language of print in books.

We began by planning an instructional sequence for teaching reading with folk fairy tales. Aside from the psychological values favoring the use of traditional literature, folk fairy tales assure predictability for a reader in repetitive and cumulative patterns of words, phrases, and sentences (Rhodes, 1981). The patterns originated in the oral tradition of storytelling. They have been preserved through retelling and were eventually written down. Folk fairy tales are ideal vehicles for initial exposure to reading because they are most easily remembered; they conform to an ideal schema which, over the years of retelling, was influenced by the limitations of what people can remember (Mandler and Johnson, 1977). So, historically, young children have learned fairy tales at home by memorizing those easily recalled patterns in selections that have been read to them over and over again. Eventually, unaided, they have learned to leaf through a book "reading" it page by page. Its been obvious to the adult observer that the "reader" was also being well served by a strong auditory memory as suggested by (Chomsky, 1976).

To begin, our staff selected folk fairy tales and organized the following titles in this sequence:

The Three Little Pigs. Scott, Foresman, 1976.

Tolstoy, Alexei. The Great Big Enormous Turnip. Scott, Foresman, 1976.

Ruwe, Mike. Ten Little Bears. Scott, Foresman, 1976.

The Lion's Tail. Scott, Foresman, 1976.

Next, we divided instruction into these six steps:

Step 1 Introduce the book: The teacher read the book to the group from a student's text, discussed the illustrations, and pointed to each word with an index (magic) finger. The children followed by listening and watching. The teacher read each page number to train the children to read every page and to teach number sequence. Our purpose in pointing to each word was to teach the child how, later, s/he was going to make the same aural-oral-visual-kinesthetic match. Also, we had learned earlier in our work with second and third graders that pointing with the magic finger was an excellent method of training children to sustain visual attention. Red vertical lines were drawn between each word in all student texts with a flow pen. These color clues were invaluable mnemonic aids, like pointing with the magic finger, to help children separate one word from another as they struggled to make the match. In the beginning we observed that, for some children, a line of print was "just one big blob" or that a word of more than one syllable was more than a single word. With lots of help from us they eventually learned to make the match. In a study of five-year-olds (Reid, 1966) observed that some literally didn't know what a "word" was when auditory stimuli were presented in the

form of phoneme sounds, vowel sounds, a word, a phrase, and a sentence. Some children misunderstood and thought all the stimuli were a "word."

Step 2 Review story sequence: Next, the teacher reviewed story sequence by displaying the illustrations in the student's text and by eliciting oral responses. Then the selection was reread in its entirety and the children were encouraged to whisper (auditorize) portions they were able to recall. Since 1978 we had observed that some of our second and third graders were inclined to auditorize during listening and reading activities, expecially during the beginning stages of instruction. Then as oral reading fluency and silent reading rates improved, the need to auditorize diminished. Others have reported the positive benefits of auditorizing (Cunningham, 1978; Bruinsma, 1980). At this step we continued to demonstrate making the match with the magic finger.

Step 3 Read in unison from student texts: Next, the children and teacher read from texts in unison with a tape recorder in the record mode. While the children pointed to each word and read each page number, the teacher carefully supervised the pointing activity to help all make an accurate match. For some, the teacher pointed above the words as the children pointed below them. For others, the teacher held children's fingers and moved them along to maintain the pace of oral reading. At the end of the story the tape was replayed and the children listened to hear themselves "reading." While they listened they pointed with a magic finger and were invited to auditorize again. Teacher-made tapes were helpful at this stage and were prepared for all reading selections. They were introduced at a critical moment to give extra practice in unison reading and auditorizing while

listening. They met a need for additional practice with a good oral model.

Step 4 Engage in dramatic play: While the children dramatized the story, the teacher assumed the role of prompter and helped them achieve exact recall of story lines. The children also enjoyed that role. They were encouraged to reinact the story as many times as interest could be sustained. Dramatic play was a favorite activity in the instructional sequence.

Step 5 Illustrate the story: Next, the children drew a picture of a story event. Sometimes they were directed to illustrate a specific event and sometimes they were given free choice. The purpose of directed activity was to review story sequence through art. The children were encouraged to write or to dictate a story to accompany their creations. Interest in this activity increased during the school year as their self-confidence increased in their ability to draw.

Step 6 "Read" to an audience: Next, the children and the teacher read the story in unison to their classmates. The pointing activity was carefully supervised to insure an accurate match. During the early stages of instruction the children began developing confidence in their ability and were bursting with enthusiasm to demonstrate their skills to their classmates. As the year progressed their self-confidence increased as other selections were learned.

Early in the year it became apparent that the schemata of some of the children were limited for understanding the phrase, "Once upon a time," and for a word like, "straw," in The Three Little Pigs. It was

not unusual for a child to be unable to recall other phrases and words. Discussions and teacher explanations helped enrich schemata and aided recall.

To summarize, the desired outcomes of the six steps were: (1) to pique the interests of children in traditional literature by the use adult oral models; (2) to assist auditory recall by reading materials that conform to an ideal schema in repetitive and cumulative patterns; (3) to promote improvements in visual discrimination and visual memory with multisensory methods; (4) to increase feelings of self-confidence and to heighten motivation; (5) to prepare the children to read independently.

The instructional program was begun in late September. The children received twenty-five minutes of instruction daily in our literature-language lab. This supplemented daily classroom instruction in the basal reader. Phase one of the program was completed in mid November. By then the children had learned to make nearly perfect matches. At that time we decided the children were ready for phase two i.e. to record the four selections they had learned to "read" on individual tape recorders after the following preparation:

Step 1 The total group and teacher reread a book in unison for a review.

Step 2 The total group was divided into two teams. The teams took turns reading alternate pages until the entire book had been read. Sometimes this activity was recorded and played back the next day because the children were eager to hear themselves.

Step 3 Children were paired for oral reading. They read alternate pages until the entire book had been read. Then the reading order was

reversed and the process was repeated, so each child had an opportunity to read the entire book. At this point the children were literally "bursting at the seams" to move on to step four.

Step 4 First practice reading at a tape recorder. Each child recorded the book at an assigned tape recorder, then rewound the tape, followed the text, and listened to their recording. At this point one child was overheard to remark, "I read the whole thing!"

During these activities the children were monitored to make certain they were making the match. After the first practice we evaluated all tapes for quality of reading accuracy, fluency, and expression; and we routinely circulated among the children and took notes while they were recording to determine if a need for a second practice was indicated. Then, during group discussion which followed, we commented positively about the tapes, described problems, and frequently recommended a second practice. Sometimes our suggestions were personalized by recording them on a child's tape. A second practice was preceded by a rereading of the book by the teacher. The children followed by pointing and whispering. We referred to this activity as a "warm-up." Then they returned to their tape recorders for a second practice and another opportunity to listen to themselves. We listed self-help strategies on a chart. They were reviewed before each practice. See the chart below.

HOW I HELP MYSELF

When I read I don't put in a word that doesn't make sense. Instead:

1. I sound the first letter in the word and read the rest of the sentence.

AND

2. I look at the picture.

If that doesn't work -

3. I raise my hand.

In time, as we monitored their oral reading and gave encouragement, the children began to apply the self-help strategies and became more self-reliant during the taping sessions.

Cassette tape recorders were placed in carrels constructed in our literature-language lab by the author. Commencing in October, each child was taught how to operate a recorder in the record and playback modes. By May 1981 all the children had read and recorded the four books listed earlier plus these six books listed in the order they were introduced:

Galdone, Paul. The Three Bears. New York, N.Y.: Scholastic, 1972.

The Pot of Gold. Scott, Foresman, 1976.

The Gingerbread Man. Scholastic, 1967.

The Missing Necklace. Scott, Foresman, 1976.

Eastman, P. D. Go Dog Go! Random House, 1961.

Eastman, P. D. Are You My Mother? Random House, 1960.

In April 1981 the children were retested to measure their progress in reading since April 1980. Those results are shown in Table I.

The most obvious evidence of the progress of these children were the improvements in their self-concepts. They had become more confident about completing reading tasks and were motivated to read library books to themselves and to others. Their oral reading had become expressive, fluent, and they had learned to make effective use of context clues when attacking words. In their classrooms most of their reading skills

TABLE I

READING TEST RESULTS FOR IDENTIFIED TITLE I STUDENTS BEFORE AND AFTER TAPE RECORDER WORK

Comprehensive Test Of Basic Skills

Student	Kindergarten, April 1980 Form S, Level A Total Reading Percentile Score	Grade 1, April 1981 Form S, Level B Total Reading Percentile Score
Marco	38	89
Tommy	22	89
Janet	33	66
Leon	13	63
Carl	32	58
Aleta	38	56
Chastity	44	51
Jason	33	51
Joan	47	51

developed at an average rate. One striking feature in their progress was the reduced incidence of observations of their classroom teachers that, "They need help with phonics." We had anticipated word attack skills would develop for most of the children if we supplied the part that had been missing in their reading experience, namely, exposure to the language of print through traditional literature. These children were, in sum, reading like normal children; and since their percentile scores were above fifty, they didn't qualify for further assistance with reading in our Title I program the next school year.

Our findings were similar in some respects to those reported by (Chomsky, 1976). She obtained encouraging reading gains in a taping program for five third-grade students who were nonfluent in reading. In a fifteen-week program they practiced taping fairy tales and original stories after listening to tapes. (Hollingsworth, 1978) effectively used the impress method in concert with a wireless taping system for teaching fourth, fifth, and sixth grade remedial reading students. Significant gains were reported. (Schneeberg, 1977) reported higher scores on standardized reading tests when children listened to the text while they read. (Carbo, 1978) found that recording part or all of books can help children reading below grade level.

Our Title I proposal included a parent-involvement component; so while we were working at school to effect improvements in reading for the nine children, a homework program was begun at home in November 1980. First, the parents signed an agreement to read to their child. They were asked to plan a quiet time daily, free of distractions, when they could read to their child. They were instructed to have their child point with a magic finger as the parent read. This

procedure matched ours in the lab. To make certain parents understood their task, we played the role of parent with the children. Then they returned home and taught their parents. We periodically evaluated the effectiveness of the program by having the children role play with us occasionally. We also demonstrated the procedures during parent-teacher conferences.

To initiate book circulation we borrowed a collection of books from our school library and checked them out from the lab. Parents signed a completion form each time they returned a book. Parents also wrote the book titles on an oversized bookmark. By glancing at a bookmark we could readily see how many books had been read by each child.

Parents were very supportive of the homework program as evidenced by the number of books circulated many times throughout the year. On an evaluation in March 1981 a majority reported their child enjoyed being read to, that the parent also enjoyed the activity, that the parent had spent more time reading - nearly every day, and that reading to the child had helped the child read much better. These responses, combined with our observations, convinced us that the parent-involvement component of our Title I program had been effective.

Conclusions

In a summary of the research in listening while reading, (Roit, Shonkoff, Weaver, 1978) concluded that, although the evidence is inconclusive, in those instances where success has been reported, paired auditory and visual information, repetition, and exposure to the rhythms and patterns of language have resulted in positive gains.

As we reviewed our efforts since 1978 i.e. changes in program, accumulated observations, and student gains, we made some objective and intuitive inferences. We saw that in some ways our conclusions supported those in the research summary just cited. We concluded that there were the following advantages favoring our approach with the nine first graders and with second and third graders of prior years:

1. Oral reading by an adult provided an exemplary model which children emulated. Pitch, rhythm, and inflection of voice conveyed meaning in expressive and fluent language. All these features were captured on tapes and used repeatedly until passages were mastered. This was a distinct advantage because poor readers usually don't hear good oral models in their reading groups - only poor ones. That observation is shared by (Allington, 1983).

2. Oral modeling provided a simultaneous presentation of auditory information at a rate that was adjusted to a child's ability to make a visual match, and all stories were recorded on tapes at a fluency rate suitable for most group listening activities.

3. Folk fairy tales contain ideal schemata in the form of easily recalled repetitive patterns. Exposure to these patterns increased auditory memory span and this - combined with practice in auditorizing, finger pointing, oral reading, and dramatic play - gradually improved visual memory. We had observed in September that children were "reading" books to an audience before they were able to make an accurate auditory-visual match. But by November they had realized the goal.

4. Dramatic play and art work functioned as opportunities to practice repetitive patterns through language, writing, and whole-body activities.

On the negative side, since 1978 we observed that the simultaneous presentation of auditory and visual information presented a condition of "information overload" for a limited number of children - a problem cited by (Roit, Shonkoff, Weaver, 1978). In our program the most obvious symptoms of overload were the inability to remember repetitive passages, the inability to sustain visual attention, and auditory distractibility during oral taping sessions - occasionally a child would complain that other children were reading too loudly. These children were usually referred for special education services.

Our continuous observations of children's progress in the lab, in the classrooms, and evaluations of the homework program suggested to us that the Title I program had contributed to improvement in the reading abilities of the nine children. Our choice of folk fairy tales for reading at school and a wider range of selections for reading at home had exposed the children to a varied assortment of appealing and satisfying literature. It appeared our program had made the total reading experiences of the children more congruent with those of their classmates. Our observations also suggested the children were learning to bridge the gap between oral language and the language of print.

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